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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0645  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 2130  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2656  
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000037

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [AA](#)  
SUBJECT: LOW TURNOUT AT PROTEST AGAINST NIGERIAN  
PRESIDENT'S PROLONGED ABSENCE

REF: A. ABUJA 00032  
[1](#)B. ABUJA 00036

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Dundas C. McCullough for reasons  
1.4. (b & d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. One day after the GON publicly denied a press report that President Yar'Adua had died, a small, lackluster group of demonstrators in Abuja demanded better governance and clarity on Yar'Adua's condition. Local media, meanwhile, continue to report mounting pressure on Yar'Adua to hand over formal powers to VP Jonathan or to resign, and intensifying politicking for a post-Yar'Adua administration. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On January 12, several hundred youth participated in a brief and peaceful demonstration organized by the "Save Nigeria" group. Organizers had predicted up to 5,000 supporters, which would have been notable for Abuja. Protesters marched from the Abuja Unity fountain (across from the Transcorp Hilton Hotel), past the secretariat building (whose perimeter wall had been pasted overnight with "We Support Yar'Adua" and "Down with Anarchy" posters, to the National Assembly gate, where security guards prevented them from entering.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Demonstrators wore white T-shirts printed with "Save Nigeria" and black pants to promote group identity, but few of the 150 invited civil society groups were named except the Nigerian Bar Association and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). A row of police on horseback escorted the marchers with uniformed civil defense monitors forming the second row. Uniformed police lined the route, played a friendly role, did not restrict anyone, and allowed pedestrians to watch from the sidewalks. During the march, a pro-Yar'Adua group sang songs and carried banners.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Marchers carried signs reading "Enough is Enough," "Yar'Adua Where Are You?," "Ibori Why Are You Free?," "No To Corruption," "Talk To Us," "We Want Better Government," and "We Are Not Terrorists" (the only oblique reference to U.S. Transportation Security Administration designation of Nigeria as a "country of interest.") Participants handed out flyers calling for a campaign against poverty -- "Poverty of Ideas," "Poverty of Hope," "Poverty of Honor," and so forth. Passers-by watched quietly from the sidewalks.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The demonstrators stayed in front of the Assembly grounds with hopes that someone would come out to address them. Eventually, Representative Farouk Lawan came out to speak. The organizers, Professor and Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, human rights lawyer and West African Bar Association

President Femi Falana, former Kaduna Governor Balarabe Musa, Pastor Tunde Bakare, and former Biafran secessionist leader Dim Chukwuenmeka Ojukwu rode in cars along the demonstration route, not showing themselves to the public until Falana, Soyinka, and Tunde welcomed Lawan.

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COMMENT  
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[¶](#)6. (C) The BBC radio interview with an apparently frail but coherent Yar'Adua, promising to return soon to Nigeria, probably did not significantly depress today's demonstration turnout since activists -- given Abuja's remote location from likely activist fountainheads -- would have been already in Abuja or on the way when the interview was broadcast. END

COMMENT  
SANDERS